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THE
NECESSITY and USEFULNESS
Of Reading the
HOLY SCRIPTURES;
And the
DISPOSITIONS
With which they ought to be Read.

Written originally in *French*, & *K*
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ADVERTISEMENT.

IT may be proper to inform the reader, that the following Discourse was originally designed, only as a Preliminary to the author's Arguments and Reflections on the Books and Chapters of the Old and New Testament, which were translated at the charge of The SOCIETY for promoting Christian Knowledge, and first published in the year 1716, and lately revised, corrected, and very much enlarged, from the author's last Edition, in 1744. But as this discourse contains many excellent instructions, which are of general use, and may, with the divine blessing, tend to convince many of the obligation they are under to read the Scriptures, and direct them how to do it in a suitable manner; it was thought expedient to publish this small Tract by itself, that those who are not able to purchase the larger works of this eminent divine, may

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have the advantage of this piece, which must be of infinite use to them, if it proves a means in God's hand to persuade them to read the Scriptures as they ought: which effect it cannot fail to produce in all, who read it with an honest heart.

*This small specimen of Mr OSTER-
VALD's writings, will likewise, it is hoped,
induce many to read his other useful and
instructive works; particularly his Argu-
ments and Reflections, which may be
looked upon as the most useful companion for
the Scriptures, and the best human means
that perhaps was ever invented, to make
those divine books produce in us the salutary
effects for which they were graciously de-
signed.*

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A
DISCOURSE,
SHEWING THE
Necessity and Usefulness
Of Reading the
HOLY SCRIPTURES,
AND THE
DISPOSITIONS
With which they ought to be Read.



THAT great numbers neglect the reading of the Holy Scriptures, is as evident, as it is deplorable. Christians there are, innumerable, who are almost entirely ignorant of the Bible; because those that have the rule over them suffer it to

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be read only by particular persons, and with the greatest precaution, as if it were a dangerous thing to put the word of God indifferently into the hands of all men. But, not to concern ourselves at present with these considerations, we shall only observe, that the greatest part, even of those who have the reading of the sacred writings recommended to them, neglect to do it. Many, it is true, for want of learning, may not be in a capacity to read the scriptures; which is a great misfortune, and a shame to Christians, that the number of those who cannot read, should still be so great among them. It may be said too, that a great many do not read the word of God, because they are unable, through their poverty, to purchase that divine book. Those to whom God has given riches, should supply this defect, by dedicating some portion to the pious use of providing Bibles for the poor. To this may be added, that a great number of domestick, and other servants, have not leisure to discharge this necessary duty; because their masters allow them not time for it. But however this be, those Christians are utterly
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inexcusable, who have it in their power to read the word of God, and will not do it.

God, in his infinite wisdom, and unbounded goodness, has supplied men, by the revelation of his will, with the most perfect means of instruction. He inspired the prophets and apostles, and was pleased their writings should be preserved, that in them truth might always remain pure, without being corrupted by the forgetfulness and inconstancy, the carelessness or malice of men. The scriptures therefore are the most valuable blessing God ever bestowed upon us, except the sending his Son into the world; they are a treasure, which contain in them every thing that can make us truly rich, and truly happy. We must therefore have very little regard for God, and his gifts, if we neglect to make a right use of this; and it would argue the greatest degree of presumption, to imagine we can do without that assistance, which God himself has judged so needful and expedient for us.

The use of the holy scriptures was very common among the primitive Christians; and as they were regularly read in their religious assemblies, so did they read them with great diligence in their families. But the scriptures were afterwards neglected, in proportion as ignorance and superstition gained ground. The people were no longer instructed in them; and though the custom was retained, of reading some portion of them in the church, they were rendered entirely useless, by being read in a language the people were unacquainted with. At length, the private use of God's word was wholly laid aside; and this divine light in a manner extinguished for several ages. About two hundred years ago, it was, as it were, taken from under the bushel, where it had lain so long concealed; and the people, in several parts of Christendom, recovered their right of reading the scriptures; but most of those, who enjoy this privilege, do not improve it as they ought.

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This indifference and neglect in reading the sacred writings, is the true cause of that ignorance, which prevails among the generality of Christians. This is the reason they have but a slight and superficial knowledge of the doctrines and duties of Christianity; and too many entertain notions that are entirely false and groundless. This is the source of the many errors which are in vogue among us, and of the many impious and libertine notions, which prevail more and more; for as soon as we forsake the scriptures, which are our only rule of faith, to follow our own reasonings, we must of necessity go astray. It is forsaking this divine light, which has occasioned many persons, who have thought themselves inspired, and imagined they had attained to the highest degree of piety and perfection, to fall into the most extravagant notions, and sometimes, into the greatest impurities. In short, to the same cause may be ascribed all that remissness, that carnal and worldly-mindedness, which is too common among Christians. All this, I say, proceeds from not reading the holy scrip-

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scriptures, and not making that use of them for which they were given.

It is true, this neglect in Christians may be in some measure supplied, by reading the word of God in our religious assemblies. And indeed, if it is surprising the people should neglect to read it, there is still more reason to be astonished, that for so many years, men should have forgot to give the reading of the sacred writings that honourable place in the publick worship, which it always enjoyed among the *Jews*, and among the first Christians. But even supposing the scriptures were regularly read in the church, this alone would not be sufficient, unless Christians read them likewise in their own houses. The exprefs declarations of God's word, the practice of the church, both under the Old and New Testament, and many other reasons, which it is not expedient to mention at present, prove the necessity of doing this. Besides, private reading is attended with some advantages, which publick reading is not. In private, one may read with
more

more leisure, consider things more closely, repeat the thing more than once, and make a more nice application. Private reading is, likewise, the best way to improve by what we hear in publick; it being impossible rightly to comprehend what is said in publick discourses and sermons, without being well versed in the scriptures. Add to this, that private reading keeps up a spirit of piety and devotion; whereas those who neglect this, inevitably fall into an indifference and disrelish for divine things; which must be attended with remissness in the duties of Religion, and in a slavish subjection to the passions.

We proceed now to consider the manner in which the holy scriptures ought to be read: Here, we shall make some reflections; first, on the books of the holy scriptures, and their several parts; and secondly, on the dispositions which ought to accompany the reading of them.

I. Every one knows, that the scriptures comprehend the OLD and NEW
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TESTAMENT: And as the Old Testament, which was written before the coming of *Jesus Christ*, is a part of the Bible, which is least read, and very many never read it at all; it seems necessary here, to prove the usefulness of those books in particular. It is a very great mistake to imagine they were designed only for the *Jews*, and that they are of no use to Christians. *St Paul* says, that *whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning*; and, speaking of what had happened to the *Israelites*, he says, That *all those things happened to them for ensamples, and were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come*. *Jesus Christ* himself exhorts his disciples, to *search the scriptures, for in them*, says he, *ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me*. Our Lord, when he thus speaks, recommends the reading and meditating on the writings of *Moses* and the prophets, as he does in several other places. On the knowledge of what is contained in those writings, depends the right understanding of the principal articles of the Christian religion.

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Of this we have a very remarkable and convincing proof, in the frequent quotations made by *Christ* and his apostles, out of the histories, prophecies, and other passages of the Old Testament. There are even whole books in the New Testament, which no one can rightly understand, who has not read the Old with some care and attention; this remark is particularly true of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, which is nothing but a comparison between the law and the gospel.

But to convince us more fully of the usefulness of the books of the Old Testament, let us examine a little into their contents: They are of three kinds, being either historical, doctrinal and moral, or prophetical.

The *Historical Books*, which are the first in order, begin at *Genesis*, and end at the book of *Esther*. They are called historical, because they contain nothing but histories, except some part of the books of *Moses*, where the laws which God gave to the *Jews* are set down. In these books, we are informed of the
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most considerable events relating to religion, and the people of God, from the creation of the world, to the return from the *Babylonish* captivity. These are the books we should begin with; for it is remarkable, that the first instruction God was pleased to give his church, was by history; this method of instruction being the most plain and easy, and suited to every capacity. Histories are so easy to comprehend and retain, that even children may understand them without much difficulty; and therefore, the foundation of their instruction should be laid here. Besides, on historical facts the whole of religion is founded; as history furnishes us with invincible proofs of the truth and divine authority of the scriptures. However, the histories of the Old Testament contain, not only facts, but likewise the doctrines and duties of religion: They set before us many noble examples, wherein are displayed the wisdom, goodness, and justice of God's providence; his love to good men, and displeasure against sinners. The eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, is a remarkable proof of the truth

truth of this observation. In that chapter, *St Paul*, designing to shew the nature and effects of faith, collects together in one view, the examples of faith, obedience, and constancy, which we meet with in the lives of the patriarchs, and other illustrious persons, who lived before the coming of *Christ*; which may convince us, that the reading and meditating on the histories of the Old Testament, must be of great use to Christians.

The books of the Old Testament, which are called *doctrinal* and *moral*, are the book of *Job*, the *Psalms*, and the writings of *Solomon*.

These books are not altogether so clear as those which are historical. In *Job*, and the *Proverbs*, for instance, we meet with some passages, whose sense is not easily determined; which is generally owing to some defect in the version; the extreme conciseness of the sentences, and the figures of speech, so different from any in use among us, making it very hard to express them in the modern languages. But if these books

books are attended with a little obscurity in some places, they may, nevertheless, be read with great advantage.

They supply us, in general, with these three things; with doctrines, with precepts of morality, and with sentiments of piety and devotion. First, We learn from them the principal doctrines of religion, such as these; That there is a God, who made the world; that he governs all things by his providence, dispensing good and evil, protecting good men, and punishing the wicked; that this God, who is perfectly just and righteous, will reward every man according to his works; with other doctrines of the like nature, which are clearly displayed in these books, and confirmed with several very useful and instructive examples, particularly in the book of *Job*, and the *Psalms*. Secondly, These books contain most excellent rules of morality, and precepts of great use, relating to the principal duties of religion, to justice, charity, purity, temperance, patience, and other virtues. Thirdly, In this part of the Old Testament, and particularly in the *Psalms*, we meet with

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exalted sentiments of piety, and the most excellent patterns of devotion; here we are taught, how we ought to be affected with the majesty of God, and reverence and adore the supreme being; with what pleasure and delight we ought to meditate upon the wonderful works of creation and providence; with what gratitude and fervency of devotion, we ought to extol his perfections, and praise him for all his mercies; that we ought to pay the highest regard to God's holy commandments, and account those advantages inestimable, which piety procures to its true votaries. Here we learn to trust in God, to call upon him in time of trouble, to submit with resignation to the divine will, and to have recourse to God's mercy, by repentance, when we have offended him. Therefore, the reading of these books must needs be of great use to guide and inflame our devotion.

The *Prophetical Books* are the writings of the prophets, from *Isaiab* to *Malachi*. They are stiled prophetical, because they principally contain prophecies, or predictions. They are not, how-

however, so strictly prophetic, but we find in them several remarkable histories, as in *Jeremiah*, *Daniel*, and *Jonah*; as well as many useful, moral instructions, in the exhortations and remonstrances of the prophets. The prophecies which make up the most considerable part of these books, are of three kinds; some relate to *Jesus Christ*, and the Christian church; others concern the *Jews* more particularly; and others foretel what was to befall the several nations and empires of the world.

If, in reading the predictions of the prophets, we meet at first with some obscurity, instead of being surprised at it, let us consider, that every prophecy must be obscure, at least, in some respects, before the event. It was so far from being necessary to the salvation of the faithful in those times, that these predictions should be absolutely clear to them, and that they should perfectly comprehend them in every part, that, on the contrary, the meaning of them must needs be concealed. The unsearchable wisdom of God, and the wonders of

but of his providence, appear with much greater lustre, when we reflect, that his designs were accomplished, and the predictions of the prophets fulfilled, without men knowing any thing of it, and by such means as no one would ever have thought of. Besides, had these predictions been absolutely clear, in every circumstance, men might have so far obstructed the designs of providence, that continual miracles, and altering the course of nature, might have been necessary in order to bring about the execution of them. Therefore, God, in great wisdom, spread a vail over the prophecies, that they might be attended with some obscurity.

It is, however, to be observed, that what was once obscure, the event has made clear. Most of the prophecies relating to the coming of *Christ*, to his sufferings, and kingdom, to the rejection of the *Jews*, and the calling of the *Gentiles*, are now very easy to comprehend. The predictions concerning the *Jews*, which foretold the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and their dispersion, occasioned first by the *Assyrians* and *Babylonians*,

bylonians, and afterwards by the *Romans*, soon after the coming of our Lord; these predictions are so perfectly explained by the event, that there is no difficulty attending them. As to those prophecies which related to other nations and kingdoms of the world, as the prophecies of *Isaiab*, from the thirteenth chapter, and the remarkable predictions of *Daniel*; if the generality of readers find them difficult, because they are ignorant of the history of those times and nations, they are quite clear to those who are acquainted with that history. Besides this obscurity, arising from the subject of the prophecies, the style of these inspired writers, who make use of various images, and figures of speech, foreign to the usages of these times, is another cause of obscurity. But with some assistance, like that which is attempted in this * work, and a little acquaintance with the language of the prophets, we may easily discover their meaning. Upon the whole, if there
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* In these Words, the Author refers to his *Arguments and Reflections on the Books and Chapters of the Old and New Testaments*, mentioned in the Advertisement before this Tract.

are some passages in their writings, which we do not perfectly comprehend, we may, without prejudice to our salvation, be ignorant of their true import.

It is a very great fault to neglect, as too many do, the reading of the prophecies. If Christians would but read them, and meditate on them, they would find an astonishing light dart from them; they would discover beauties, which they are now strangers to; and would have a more lively sense of the truth and excellence of religion, than they now have. In fact, nothing can be conceived a more convincing proof of the being of God, nothing a more undeniable argument that he governs all things, and that the scriptures are his word, than to see the exact completion of those ancient prophecies, which were in the hands of the *Jews*, such as we now have them, many ages before the coming of our Lord. For this reason, *St Peter* advises Christians to read and meditate on the prophecies, as a most likely means to strengthen them in the faith. *We have also*, says he, *a more sure word of prophecy, where-*
unto

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unto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.

THE NEW TESTAMENT is that part of the scriptures, which it most concerns us to be acquainted with. If the Old and New Testaments be compared together, the latter is certainly the clearest and most perfect: For though the doctrine of the gospel be at the bottom the same with that of *Moses*, and the prophets; yet it is certain, that the divine truths, the duties, the promises and threatnings of the Gospel, are proposed with greater strength and evidence, than those of the Old Testament. The gospel has not only removed the shadows of the law, and set in a clear light what was before revealed only in part; but, likewise, teaches us many things, which the faithful of old knew not, and which the prophets themselves, as our Saviour observes, were ignorant of. Hence it is, that St *Paul* calls those things *mysteries*, or *secret things*, which were unknown to former ages. Nor is it to be wondered, that we find

greater light in the Gospel, than in the Law: *Moses* and the prophets speak in the Old Testament; but in the New, it is *Jesus Christ*, the Son of God, of whom it is said, *This is my beloved Son, hear him.* St Paul makes this distinction, when he says, *God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, has, in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son.*

The New Testament consists of the *Gospels*, the *Acts of the Apostles*, and the *Epistles*. Of these, the Gospels are the first in order and dignity; which offer to our view, First, The discourses of our Lord, as they proceeded from his sacred lips; the most holy and most perfect laws, which he taught mankind, that thereby they might learn to know God, and to serve him in spirit and in truth; the duties which he recommends to the practice of his disciples; the rewards and punishments of another life; and all these attended with such a degree of evidence and conviction, as is to be met with no where else. Secondly, We read in the Gospels an

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account

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account of our Saviour's miracles, which display his divine power, and, at the same time, his great goodness, since all his miracles were acts of mercy and kindness. When we read the Gospels, we ought to give great attention to our Lord's miracles, as God was pleased to make choice of this method, to prove that *Jesus* was the Messiah. Lastly, In them we see described the unspotted life of our great Redeemer, his zeal, his obedience to the will of his Father, his amazing love to mankind, his meekness, humility, sincerity, purity, patience, and renouncing of the world. These virtues, which shine forth in his life, are all united in his death, and appear with the greatest lustre. To the history of the death of *Jesus Christ*, the gospel adds likewise an account of his resurrection and ascension, which are the foundation of our *faith* and *hope*.

From hence it is evident, that the Gospels are the most considerable part of the New Testament; for which reason, the reading of them has always been looked upon in the church as an important thing

thing of the greatest importance ; and as the *Jews*, though they read the writings of the prophets, and received them as divine, had a particular veneration for the law of *Moses*, and gave that the first rank ; so Christians have always expressed an extraordinary respect for the Gospels. From hence proceeded the antient custom of rising up, and standing all the time the Gospels were reading in the church, and the custom of reading and explaining some part of them every Sunday in the year.

The *Acts of the Apostles* inform us, in what manner the gospel, after our Lord's ascension, was preached, both at *Jerusalem* and the places adjacent, and in several parts of the world. The reading this book is of great use, and as it is wholly historical, it cannot be very difficult to understand.

The *Epistles*, or letters, which the apostles sent, either to the churches in their time, or to particular persons, make likewise a part of the canonical books of the New Testament. St *Peter* informs us, that St *Paul's* Epistles were

reckoned among the divine writings, in the life-time of the apostles. It would be a gross mistake, to imagine that the Gospels alone are sufficient, and that the Epistles may be dispensed with. The Epistles furnish us with an explanation of several articles, which are not altogether so evident from the Gospels; so that the Gospels are more clear, in many respects, when the Epistles are added to them. In truth, *Christ* did not always think fit to explain himself fully and completely upon every subject; his thoughts were often concealed under figurative expressions, or similitudes, which were somewhat obscure, and were not to be entirely cleared up, till after his ascension: There are even many things, which *Christ* did not tell his apostles, while he was with them, and which, consequently, are not to be found in the Gospels. Hear our Lord's own words, *I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now; howbeit, when the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you into all truth, and will shew you things to come.* The apostles, after they had received the Holy Ghost, were much more enlightened than before;

fore; and therefore we meet, in their writings, with the discovery of many things of the greatest importance, and even such as are absolutely necessary for our instruction.

For the right understanding of the Epistles, the chief thing to be observed, is the occasion and design of writing them. Though they treat of different subjects, as the exigences of the church required at that time; yet what the apostles deliver upon those subjects serves to clear up several points in religion. Their aim, in general, was to preserve in the Christian churches, then lately founded by them, sound doctrine, and purity of manners; and to guard the faithful against the errors which many persons, converted to Christianity from among the *Jews* and *Gentiles*, took great pains to propagate, and thereby corrupted the doctrines and practices of Christianity. The grand design of the apostles in all their Epistles, is to persuade Christians to persevere in the faith, and in a holy life; and therefore they all end with earnest exhortations to the practice of the virtues and duties of

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religion : There are even some, which were written with no other view, particularly the Epistles called Catholick, which, except a few places, wherein the apostles slightly touch upon some article of faith, consist wholly of moral precepts, and exhortations to true holiness.

II. From what has been said, it appears, that the reading of the Old and New Testament is a most excellent means of instruction and edification. But before we can reap this advantage from it, the heart and mind must be fitly disposed for the reading of them. The scriptures may be read, and very frequently too, and yet no advantage ensue, if we read them only in a cursory way, and for the sake of reading. It is with reading, as it is with prayer, and other acts of religion; they are of no use, and even become sinful, when not attended with the necessary dispositions.

The necessary dispositions for reading the Holy Scriptures.

1. The first necessary disposition is *Attention*; that is, when a man reads, his mind should be free, composed, and disengaged from other thoughts. Above all, we must take heed that our heart be not disordered by our passions; for the heart and the passions are the great cause of distraction and inattention in reading, as well as in prayer; the mind naturally dwelling upon those things, which have taken possession of the heart. For this reason, it is convenient to make choice for reading, of those seasons in which we are disengaged from other things, and particularly the morning. It is likewise of great use, before we begin to read, to stir up our attention, by seriously considering what we are going about, and reflecting, that when we read the scriptures, God speaks to us, and by his word desires to make us happy, and bring us to everlasting life. To secure attention, we must likewise read with deliberation. Many are very fond of reading a great

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deal,

deal, and running over the scriptures in a short time; forgetting that what makes reading profitable is attention, meditation, and serious reflection on what we read. Reading, which is the nourishment of the soul, is like food to the body, which cannot support life and vigour, unless it be chewed and digested. Let us therefore avoid precipitation, do nothing in a hurry, and allow ourselves leisure to weigh and consider well what we read: To this end, we must avoid reading too long at a time; for short readings are generally best: however, the following distinction may be observed. When we read the Historical Books, we may read more at a time, and faster; because history is more connected, its transitions from one subject to another are not so quick, and its connection engages and keeps up the attention, and makes it easier to retain what has been read. But when chapters are read, which contain doctrines or precepts, as in the book of *Job*, in the Proverbs, and Epistles, one cannot read so long together; because each verse demands a particular consideration, and therefore, we must
read

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read the less, and with the greater deliberation.

2. We must read *frequently* and *diligently*. No one can be sufficiently acquainted with the scriptures, without making them familiar by frequent reading. Regular and frequent reading gives us an opportunity of meditating on them the more; whereas those who read but seldom, will never furnish their minds, much less fill their hearts, with what is contained in those sacred books. Besides, a careful and constant reading will give us a greater relish for God's word; which the more we read, and meditate, the more beauties we discover in it; the more it enlightens the understanding, and sanctifies and rejoices the heart. A Christian, therefore, should make this divine word his regular study; should meditate therein day and night; and as he every day takes food for the nourishment of his body, so should he every day give his soul that heavenly food, which will nourish him to eternal life.

3. We must read with *judgment* and

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discretion, if we would rightly understand the sense of scripture, and discern the use we are to make of it. If this disposition be wanting, we may read without advantage, and even by reading run into dangerous errors.

This *judgment* and *discretion* is necessary, First, In order to distinguish how far what we read is the word of God. For as there are many actions related in scripture, not for our imitation, but rather to inspire us with horror and detestation against them; so there are many things, which were not committed to writing to be the rule either of our thoughts or actions. The sacred writers sometimes set down the speeches and sentiments of the wicked: For instance, in the prophet *Malachi* we read these words, *It is in vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances?* And in one of *St Paul's* epistles, we meet with this maxim of carnal and profane men, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die*: But when we read these, and such like passages, we must remember, that those who speak thus, are wicked men.

And even those, who are in scripture commended for their piety, did not always act in strict conformity to it: Thus, when *David* vowed utterly to destroy *Nabal's* house, we must conclude he sinned in so doing; and the discourses of *Job's* friends, though they are extremely beautiful and instructive, are not to be approved of in every respect; for it is said, *God was wroth with them, because they had not spoken the thing that was right.*

This discernment is likewise necessary, in order to judge in what sense we are to interpret what we read; otherwise, we may often be greatly mistaken. For example, when *Moses* says, *The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart*, one might imagine the hardness of mens hearts proceeds from God, and that he is the author of it; which would be a notion shocking and blasphemous to the highest degree. When *St Paul* says, *That Jesus Christ has delivered us from the law, that he has blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances, that was against us; and that we are justified without the deeds of the law;*

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law; we must consider in what sense he says it; or else, we may run into a most pernicious error, and imagine, Christians are dispensed with keeping the moral law, and that good works are not necessary. Every day we hear sinners and libertines pervert texts of scripture, to excuse themselves, and extenuate their crimes. *Unlearned and unstable men*, as St Peter observed in his time, *wrest that divine book to their own destruction*. Examples of this kind are innumerable; which proves, that it is of the greatest importance to read the scriptures with prudence and discretion.

One of the best ways to prevent mistaking the true sense of scripture, is to have a constant eye to the design which the sacred writers had in view; to examine upon what occasion, and to what end they speak; to observe the connection of what is said, with what precedes, and what follows; and to compare what we read with other passages, which may serve to explain it. If any one should take all the verses of the scriptures apart, as so many uncon-

connected sentences, with each its proper sense and meaning, much like the sentences in the book of *Proverbs*, he would run into very great errors. We must never lose sight of the end and design of what is said, if we desire to discover the true meaning of God's word. This we must be particularly careful to do in the books and chapters which are doctrinal, and especially in the Epistles; which is the reason we have been obliged to add a little to the length of the Arguments of those chapters*.

If a right judgment be necessary, as we have observed, in order to understand the scriptures, it is not less useful in order to discover the improvement we are to make of them. To this end, it must be considered, that the great design of the scriptures, and the use they should be applied to, is to produce in us true faith, and the love of God, and thereby bring us to eternal life. *These things are written,*

* See OSTERVOLD'S *Arguments and Reflections*.

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ten, says St John, that ye might believe
that Jesus is the Son of God, and that
believing ye might have life through his
name. St Paul says likewise, that what-
soever things were written aforetime, were
written for our learning; that we, thro'
patience and comfort of the scriptures,
might have hope. This is the natural
and genuine effect of every part of re-
velation: Its doctrines are revealed,
that we may receive them with faith;
that they may purify our hearts, and
lead us to love and fear God; its com-
mandments were given, that we might
keep them; its promises and threaten-
ings tend wholly to dissuade us from
that which is evil, and incline us to
that which is good; and the examples
which the scriptures set before us, have
the same tendency.

Therefore, whenever we read the
scriptures, we must endeavour to dis-
cover, first, what is of use to instruct
and inform us; and then, what tends
to sanctify us, and bring us to God;
that what we read may always excite
us more and more to piety, and dispose

us to live a godly life. Moreover, it is of great importance, for every one to take notice of what particularly concerns himself, and what bears the greatest affinity to his own circumstances and necessities. In this impartial application to ourselves, of what we meet with in God's word, consists the right use of this book. This St James teaches us, when he says, *If any man be a bearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he bebooldeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.* Whereas the wise and faithful hearers of the word, are those who seriously and attentively consider and meditate upon it, and obey its commands. By which the Apostle shews, that the use we must make of the holy scriptures, is to learn obedience; that we must read and hear them with a design to grow better; and that he who does not make this use of them *deceiveth his own soul.*

4. The scriptures must be read with *submission, and obedience of faith.* Since
it

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it is God who speaks in them, we have nothing to do, but to be well assured, that we rightly understand their meaning, which is never difficult in things necessary to salvation; and then, we are with submission and docility to receive whatever they reveal, and make that the rule of our faith and practice. Therefore, when we read the histories recorded in the scriptures, we must believe them as firmly as if we were eyewitnesses of every event; which we have the more reason to do, as there is no history which is attended with so many convincing proofs of its truth and certainty.

When the scriptures propose doctrines, as the objects of our faith, we must embrace them without the least doubt or hesitation. If the doctrines revealed are of such a nature, that it is impossible fully to comprehend the reason, or the manner of their existence, this should not in the least stagger our faith. We must consider, that the most evident and incontestable truths, if we attempt to fathom them, are attended with

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with difficulties, which no one can resolve. Therefore, it must be prudent, as well as pious, upon such occasions, not to give way to a spirit of curiosity; but to lay aside vain reasonings, and rash inquiries, which would only serve to tempt us to doubting and infidelity. God has spoken, and let that suffice.

When we read the commands and precepts, which God has given us in his word to be the rule of our actions, it is our duty to believe, that obedience and conformity to them is absolutely and indispensibly necessary. And as the sense of the scriptures is never obscure in this respect, and it is impossible we should be deceived, unless we wilfully shut our eyes against the truth; all we have to do is, with humility, and an honest heart, to submit to whatever God is pleased to command; continually remembering, that as he has an absolute right and authority to command our Obedience, so are we sure, he will require nothing of us, but what tends to make us happy. Should the divine commands appear ever so disagreeable,
and

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and thwart our most favourite passions and inclinations, it suffices, that God has said, *This do*, to make it our duty to obey; or, *This ye shall not do*, to oblige us to abstain. We must silence our passions, and not listen to the suggestions of our own hearts; for our passions are the enemies, which raise all the difficulties we meet with in the way of God's commands, and suggest false reasons to excuse our disobedience. And if, to this end, it be necessary to resist our inclinations, and do violence to ourselves, let us remember, this is the best proof we can give, that faith, and the love of God, is the ruling principle of our actions. Resisting our inclinations, and overcoming our natural reluctance, is the only test of our obedience, and a proof, that our will is in entire submission to the divine. But it is a dangerous thing, and repugnant to the nature of faith, to argue, when God commands, and to dispute, either about the nature or necessity of our duty. To banish all false reasonings, and all vain pretences, whereby men endeavour to elude the exprefs declarations of
God's

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God's word, is the reason, why the apostles, when speaking of the laws by which we shall be judged, so frequently advise us, *Not to be deceived, nor suffer ourselves to be seduced by philosophy and vain deceit*, and the like.

Lastly, This submission must take place, likewise, in the promises and threatnings contained in the scriptures; that is, when they describe the happiness of the life to come, or the punishments reserved for the wicked, we ought no more to doubt of the certainty of those promises, or threatnings, than if we now actually saw the completion of them, and the great day of retribution was already come. This is one of the principal effects of faith. *Faith*, says St Paul, *is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*. Now, since such is the nature of that submission of faith, which ought to accompany the reading of the scriptures; if we have it not, we shall read them and hear them in vain. *The word doth not profit, unless it be attended with faith in them that hear it.*

5. The last disposition with which the scriptures ought to be read, is *piety and devotion*. This disposition is the principal, and includes all the rest. He that reads the scriptures, must have a love for truth and virtue ; should have a heart inclined to good, and sincerely desirous to know the will of God, and to do it. This upright intention is what our Lord calls in the Gospel, *An honest, and good heart*, which makes a man, *when he has heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience*. This makes the mind attentive, inspires it with that prudence and judgment, which is so necessary to the right understanding of what God would have us know and do to be saved. Those who have this pious intention, this honest heart, fail not to enter into the true sense of the scriptures, and to discover their beauties. This *Jesus Christ* teaches us, in these remarkable words, *If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of my doctrine*. God manifests himself to those that seek him ; and sheds abroad in their hearts the all-

all-quickning light of his holy Spirit, and furnishes them with the most useful knowledge.

To conclude the whole. As the reading of the scriptures requires a *pious* heart, so does it likewise demand a heart truly *devout*. Devotion, which, by the confession of all who make any pretences to religion, is a necessary qualification in prayer, is not less requisite in reading. When God speaks to us in his word, we ought not to be less affected with those sentiments of reverence, zeal, joy, and love, which devotion inspires, than we ought to be, when we speak to him in our prayers: Nay, prayer itself should always accompany our reading. There is no better way to prepare to *hear the voice of God*, than to call upon him, and *lift up our hearts unto him*. It is by humbly imploring the assistance of the holy Spirit, that we obtain that grace, which prepares the heart, and disposes it to love God, and keep his commandments. By this alone, the reading of the holy scriptures will become profitable

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able to our salvation, and bring us to that happy end, for which God has pleased to commit them to writing. God grant, that the reflections now made, and those which are dispersed through the body of this * Work, may produce this effect on those that read them.

* That is, *The Arguments and Reflections on the Old and New Testament*, as before mentioned.

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